

**Certified Public Manager Project**  
**The B.R.I.D.G.E. Program**  
*“Broadening the Range in Developing Great Employees”*

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## **Problem Statement**

*Healthy People Living in Healthy Communities* is the vision of the Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC). That vision is realized through the agency's mission to improve the quality of life for all South Carolinians by protecting and promoting the health of the public and the environment. The agency has approximately 3,500 employees serving across the state whose work makes a difference in the lives of South Carolinians every day. The agency provides a wide range of resources and services like providing vital health care services, coordinating disease control, monitoring and regulating pollution, ensuring food safety, supporting healthy nutrition, responding to natural disasters, providing research and statistics on the state's health and environment, and much more.

Working in public health is not easy and, to some, not fun or interesting work, but as noted above, it is very important work. Vacant positions are generally open for extended periods of time and there are numerous reasons why. Those hired lack experience or do not stay long as they seek more competitive salaries and/or more challenging work. They gain a little experience and move on to other jobs. They may also seek different work environments that conform to their interests (i.e. more casual work environment, non-traditional opportunities for engagement, etc). If we do not address these issues, the agency can risk losing sustainable knowledge, waste both human and monetary resources, and lose valuable time in serving the public more efficiently and effectively.

In the midst of a mass exodus of agency leaders and pioneers<sup>1</sup>, DHEC and other state agencies are struggling to recruit, hire and retain a highly competent and sustainable workforce. The Teachers' Employee Retention Incentive (TERI) Plan was introduced several years ago to retain quality teachers beyond their retirement and was later expanded to other state employees. In August 2012, the SC Legislature voted to end

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<sup>1</sup> End of TERI means thousands of SC jobs could become vacant. June 2017 article retrieved from <http://thestate.com/news/politics-government/article158020269.html>

the TERI plan by June 2018<sup>2</sup>. There are roughly 1,800 state employees exiting state agencies by June 30, 2018, including 216 employed at DHEC.

Of the 216 employees exiting DHEC in June 2018, sixteen (16) are Upstate Public Health Region (UPHR) employees who have a tenure of twenty (20) plus years of service and represent critical positions. If the agency is not able to recruit interested and competent employees for these positions, then train, energize, engage and retain them, coupled with the trend of brief employment tenures, DHEC may not be able to sustain vital public health services as they are currently provided and will not be able to meet the upcoming needs, efficiently and effectively. UPHR is committing time to evaluating and exploring options to combat this concern. Several initiatives are already in place including a training center pilot, newly hired region training coordinator and subcommittees working on building employee morale. Although each region operates under policies and procedures developed by central office DHEC, each region interprets the policies differently. This is important because each region has its own characteristics that conform to its geographical location and its proximity to other employment options and resources.

With so many opportunities for a more competitive employment in the Upstate, a coordinated effort is needed to define a better process for recruiting, hiring and maintaining employees. That concerted effort will need to also assure that a developed process will be sustained and that as policy and other needs change, there will be an effort to discuss the impacts of one initiative on the other and make changes to the protocol as needed.

The first attempt to build a comprehensive approach was the initiation of the Upstate Training Center in May 2017. The center would assure that staff received adequate, timely and relevant training. The center is still being piloted, but in its first eight (8) months, sixty-six (66) employees were trained and sixty-one (61) or 92% are still employed. This addressed the training needs, but the need for a consolidated effort was not yet realized. As part of its efforts to implement the new strategic plan, central office hired a Region Training Coordinator but

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<sup>2</sup> Senate panel: End TERI plan by 2018. August 2012 article retrieved from <http://thestate.com/latest-news/article14403474.html>  
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this further confused the efforts because the roles of the two entities caused confusion and neither of their purposes fulfilled the need to bridge all resources. One was for on-boarding training and the other was for ongoing training and evaluation. In order to meet DHEC's core strategy to *facilitate access to and delivery of dependable, timely, professional, and culturally appropriate services to meet the needs of communities and our partners* (Service and Accessibility), we must streamline our efforts and maximize our resources.

## **Data Collection**

Late in 2016, while realizing the potential impact of the looming workforce crisis, the UPHR Leadership Team, myself included, started a series of data collections and conducted a human resource management retreat to discuss the findings. First, we compiled data on the length of time that it took to recruit and hire an employee to their start date. Next, the team analyzed data around training needs using several surveys that assessed current capacity and needs of new employees. We wanted to find out if we were doing justice to our processes to adequately onboard and train employees in hopes of improving the success of their tenure with the agency. Finally, after DHEC established a statewide committee called the Strategic Plan Champions (SPC), who would lead the charge to make sure that the agency's strategic plan was promoted and embraced, the region expanded the initiative to include three subcommittees at the region level. The subcommittees are the Committee for Acknowledging and Recognizing Employees (CARES), the Employee Health and Wellness (EHW) committee and the Customer Service committee. The subcommittees are working to engage current employees based on their topic of coverage. All of their work enhances communications around the agency's strategic plan and new core value statements; *Pursuing Excellence, Inspiring Innovation, Promoting Teamwork and Embracing Service*.

An analysis of the data collected did not mitigate the needs of a coordinated effort to assure that all of these parts were working together to maximize resources and time. As a member of the leadership team, a member of the Upstate Training Center Advisory group and the facilitator for the SPC subcommittees, I lead the

charge to develop an idea on how to bring the work of the initiatives together and allow room to add strategies to enhance the full process of recruiting, hiring and maintaining employees in the Upstate Public Health Region.

First, I conducted a review of the current policies for recruiting and hiring, a review of turnover data, a review full-time equivalent (FTE) employee data and a review of the current vacancy analysis. Then I reviewed current initiatives and supports in place to fill aforementioned gaps. Finally, I conducted two focus groups and several key informant interviews to confirm findings of the reviews and potential needs of past, present and future employees. The results of the reviews, focus groups and interviews are noted below in the data analysis.

## **Data Analysis**

Results of the data review were overwhelming! A review of the recruitment and hiring policies did not allow for any flexibility or innovation in recruiting and hiring employees. The basic process was to check funding for an eligible and vacant slot, submit a position request and wait for approval, then post the position through traditional channels on the state's job portal. The process may have taken several weeks or even months depending on the need to establish a position or not. After posting, there was another length of time to accept applications, close the posting, set-up interviews, conduct interviews and then make an offer after selecting the top three candidates. The process was antiquated and, per some of the focus group responses, it was "*just too long*" and "*lacked important information about the job and its actual duties*" (Appendices A, B and C).

Candidates who scored high with experience were applying to several jobs at the same time they were applying to DHEC, so with a lengthy recruiting and hiring process, the region risked losing the interest of many highly qualified candidates and actually lost a few to the process. A review of a new hires report for employees between November 2015 and July 2017, revealed 186 new hires and it took an average 98.5 days for a new

employee to go through the process of being recruited to their start date.<sup>3</sup> As the region filled positions, just as many more positions became vacant.

A review of data from a vacancies report dated between August 2013 and March 2017, uncovered 253 vacancies<sup>4</sup>. Seventy-one percent (179) of those positions were positions that comprise the largest pool of employees in the region under three major classifications. Some of these positions took up to 160 days to fill. While all public health regions were struggling with similar issues of recruitment and hiring, the Upstate encountered an excessive number of vacancies. This led to a much larger impact on the time needed to recruit and hire into those vacant positions. Hiring issues across the state also led central office DHEC to review and revise the overall process for hiring.<sup>5</sup> Factors proposed in the newly revised process were intended to give more opportunities to current employees while following state protocol regarding the posting, recruiting and hiring of new employees. Upstate used that revision to implement a newly revised process for recruiting and hiring within the region and that process included a step-by-step checklist that highlighted areas that expended the most time and how the region could improve upon those processes (see Appendix E). The new process required posting internally for up to two weeks or 14 days prior to posting externally. There was an understanding across leadership that fair and equal treatment would be practiced during the process. Unexpected delays in reaching candidates and their references as well as delays in background checks doomed the revised process. The region was also in competition with many local job opportunities that were able to pay higher wages. After several unsuccessful attempts to improve upon that process, it was abandoned and the region went back to the “standard” process it had been using prior to the vacancy study. All hiring managers agreed to work diligently with the personnel office to post, recruit and hire in a timely manner.

A review of the current FTE or full-time equivalent employees revealed a need for a staffing model that could help determine if the region could operate with fewer employees and/or services or even work with

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<sup>3</sup> Region Internal Report – New Employee Database Report, July 2017

<sup>4</sup> Region Internal Report – Vacancies Analysis and Proposal for Alternative 1<sup>st</sup> Interview, July 2017.

<sup>5</sup> DHEC Procedures Manual – Hiring/On-boarding Procedures, October 2016

combined services as staff are cross-trained.<sup>6</sup> The region expends approximately 85% of its budget on staffing, so it is vital that this data be used to develop a competitive compensation plan for its employees and help develop a workable staffing model with comparable pay. A review of a recent report of turnover data revealed that more region employees are leaving for a higher paying job offer.<sup>7</sup>

Noting the above data and the potential chaos born with each concern, there is a need for a concerted or consolidated effort to organize all of the moving parts of the workforce crisis. There is a need to develop a streamlined process that would build capacity to “grow our own employees”. This means that the agency would start early in one’s education tenure to learn of their interests, develop opportunities for them to experience public health work, offer relevant and gap training opportunities, present appealing job opportunities, develop innovative marketing strategies, enhance the recruiting and hiring process, keep an active relationship with the employee to keep them satisfied and meet their needs as they arise. One untapped opportunity that is still a part of this streamlined process is the engagement of retired persons and what resources they could provide the agency even after retirement. They have extensive knowledge and experience and could potentially volunteer and/or receive small pay incentives to help train new employees and provide input into growing the agency. There are bits of these activities occurring throughout the agency, but in order to streamline the processes, they all need to be organized together or at least have someone or some entity overseeing the process so that they can promote some accountability. Since there is no other program of its kind, the BRIDGE program was developed to fill the void.

## **Implementation Plan**

The BRIDGE Program is recommended to be the conduit of a consolidated effort by addressing the following goals: (1) develop more innovative strategies to improve the process of recruiting, hiring and maintaining employees, (2) develop a new process to assess and engage current and retiring employees, and

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<sup>6</sup> Region Internal Report – FTE Inventory, August 2017

<sup>7</sup> Region Internal Report – Turnover Report, January 2018

finally (3) develop a protocol for ongoing research and evaluation that will maintain a base for training and development of future employees. The BRIDGE program would work as a collaboration of the Upstate Training Center, the newly hired Region Training Coordinator, and the SPC subcommittees. Please see a sample program summary in Appendix D that outlines how the current and new components of the BRIDGE program would work together to bridge past, present and future employee innovations towards recruit, hiring and retaining great employees.



## **BRIDGE Program Objectives and Timeline**

**Objective 1:** By June 30, 2018, assign or hire a region volunteer coordinator who would be responsible for coordinating the BRIDGE Program; position would be supervised by the region personnel director.

**Objective 2:** By July 31, 2018, organize and set up an operating structure for the BRIDGE Program including a meeting schedule for the BRIDGE Collaboration.

**Objective 3:** By August 31, 2018, establish the BRIDGE program by introducing the structure of the program to the Region Leadership Team, the Upstate Training Center, the Region Training Coordinator and the SPC Subcommittee Chairs in a scheduled collaboration meeting.

**Objective 4:** By December 31, 2018, revise the exit survey and evaluation process to include an invitation to serve on a Past Employee Advisory (PEA) Council and invitation to volunteer as a trainer or mentor with incentives. NOTE: The Past Employee Advisory Council (similar to a “member-at-large” position) would share their knowledge, retain history of the agency and provide input into planning for future services and training.

**Objective 5:** By December 31, 2018, establish the Bright Ideas campaign where employees can submit innovative ideas that can enhance their tenure with DHEC, improve customer service and/or establish more efficient services or processes. NOTE: Employees could receive a one-time incentive or collect points for their ideas towards defined prizes (special parking, free days, long lunch, days off, etc.).

**Objective 6:** By December 31, 2018, solicit and explore structured partnerships (MOU/MOA relationships) with local high schools and secondary educational institutions, health education consortiums and other potential public health partners to establish a process for paid or work exchange student experiences. NOTE: This objective would include opportunities to shadow for a day, participate in an internship, fellowship or preceptor relationship or volunteer to allow an opportunity to experience public health and determine if they are truly interested.

## **Evaluation Method**

The BRIDGE Program will be evaluated by instituting bi-annual surveys to new hires, current and retired employees. There will be opportunities to utilize ideas from the Bright Ideas campaign to improve on parts of the program as well as opportunities to share ideas with the training center and through the SPC subcommittees. The Strategic Plan Champion subcommittees, in collaboration with the BRIDGE Coordinator, will facilitate the process evaluation. They will periodically review and analyze turnover and hiring data and compare it to the baseline. The BRIDGE Coordinator will also use minutes and information from the collaboration meeting minutes to inform decisions throughout the development process, process the outcome data and share it with leadership and other key stakeholders.

## **Summary and Recommendations**

The BRIDGE program, if utilized effectively, will answer many questions and provide an ongoing means for assessing and evaluating new and innovative ideas as they are introduced. The data suggests that any effort must work to enhance recruitment strategies, aggressively review and re-establish their hiring processes and establish consistent practices to maintain current employees through a vigorous employee engagement plan that includes a plan for comparable compensation packages. In addition to this work, Upstate must also establish and implement continuity and succession plans so that the public is not short-changed in services and programs that promote positive health outcomes and improve their overall health status while we work to improve our employee relations.

**Appendix A – Phone Focus Group (New Hires within the last 2 years)**  
**Summary of Focus Group Responses (5 New Hires)**  
**February 2, 2018**

**Opening Statement/Question:** The agency is struggling to recruit, hire and maintain competent employees. What needs to be in place or needs to be done around the following topics to recruit, retain/maintain and enhance employee relationships?

1. **Recruitment of employees** – postings need share more about the position, takes too long for the hiring process, better job descriptions b/c they are too vague, millennials like to know how they can contribute to the community, conduct recruitment sessions, a lot of people don't know that DHEC is a "Public Health" agency, they only know about restaurant inspections, etc, think it's more of regulations, there is not a huge knowledge base about what DHEC is, also improvement with the job descriptions, felt that she was not sure what she was applying for.
2. **Retention/Maintenance of employees** – clear line of where to go from where you are now, they get in positions, beneficial to have someone checking in with the new hires outside of their department, to talk more opening about their needs or areas where they need support to talk about what the future holds, idea of someone outside of the department is a great idea, some of the higher ups should be more welcome and friendly to everyone and not turn their noses up at them
3. **Retirement of employees** – attending training to get to know other people in the agency, implement a policy to visit with other people and attend training, can call others to ask questions across the health department, this helps with growth and for retirement, understand the retirement plan, this should be part of the recruitment plan, more open door policy to have someone go through the plan, while in on-boarding, seems that you were just cycled through, watched videos, and moved on, not comfortable asking certain questions, especially if coming from a private agency, switching from 401K to what you get in the optional retirements plans in the Upstate, since it's a long time before millennials retire, they want to know what in store for them.
4. **Extra question about relationship to keep with the agency** – some retirees have developed family at the job and it's hard to leave, has a retiree working with her and it helps, losing a huge piece of their life, these we should keep in touch with them, a social platform, meet up once a month to get lunch, walking groups to reconnect when can, sign-up on a news platform to get the DASH or something similar for retirees, "what is DHEC up to?", he still gets some from his colleges, etc. Sometimes after a year or so, they may be interested in volunteering at region day or something, to know opportunities available to them.

**Appendix B – Region Leadership Team Focus Group (2-25+ year Employees)**  
**Summary of Focus Group (10 Team Members) and Interview Responses (1 Team Member)**  
**January 23, 2018**

**Opening Statement/Question:** The agency is struggling to recruit, hire and maintain competent employees. What needs to be in place or needs to be done around the following topics to recruit, retain/maintain and enhance employee relationships?

1. **Recruitment of employees** – need a comprehensive analysis of compensation, need to speed up the process, more effective marketing and clearly depict the positions in the postings, need better awareness of competitors who pull from the same applicant pool, need to partner with Universities and maybe some senior classes at local schools, advertise more while out in the communities, need to share more of what we do through the posted positions
2. **Retention/Maintenance of employees** – need to develop a career plan for each employee, need these plans in place to expedite their training, this effects their tenure and morale, increase compensation and make fair and equal pay, explore tuition reimbursement again and offer more opportunities for education, offer performance pay, enhanced salary scales, get in tune what generations want (i.e. ones coming right out of college, etc), they like more technology work and opportunities, millennials also like instant gratification and need more real world applications on the job, need to develop opportunities to develop working relationships.
3. **Retirement of employees** – retirement as we know it will completely change in a few years, considering those who are on TERI and those who will change jobs soon, in order to have employees stay, we need to consider what they want to stay at DHEC, they need more options when making decisions about long-term items like retirement; need enough info up front; what can we offer in competition, we should also give retirees opportunities to come back and mentor to current and new employees; need to look at what is being taught in schools and try to match some of those skills; need to promote “life skills” somehow since most don’t get them in schools anymore; hold an annual awareness day of retirement options and benefits, almost like they do for open enrollment.

**Appendix C – Key Informant Interview – Training Coordinator**  
**Summary of Focus Group and Interview Responses**  
**January 31, 2018**

**Opening Statement/Question:** The agency is struggling to recruit, hire and maintain competent employees. What needs to be in place or needs to be done around the following topics to recruit, retain/maintain and enhance employee relationships?

1. **Recruitment of employees** – need larger social media presence, not reaching the right people, out of college want to make an impact, need staff to market to this base b/c they are a easy target; offer “video contests”, etc.
2. **Retention/Maintenance of employees** – need to make more reception decisions and not political decisions, need to use the experience of the teams as a collective (i.e. 2-3 employees may have a combined experience of 80+ years, pull them together to garner their knowledge, “spread the wealth of knowledge”, need to make it so good that they don’t want to leave, the new generation know that they want to contribute and are eager to share what they bring to the table; make opportunities for them; loyalty doesn’t pay and most know that so how do you change that, offer a school or tuition reimbursement program, we are missing the economic impact of a trained and invaluable employee, that’s the missing part of the financial equation
3. **Retirement of employees** – burn out sends employees out with no interest to return and no interest to return some of their knowledge; also part of the financial equation; current retirement program are not that valuable at a 1.82 multiplier, some leave b/c of trust and feel that they are not valued, find out why they left, did they pile on duties with no extra pay, was it the organizational culture, no incentives for moving up in the agency, and if offer incentives, make sure they are ones that don’t make them sacrifice family values for accepting it, need to develop something like a stress meter to gauge how staff feel when given extra duties v/s their normal duties, could volunteer with the agency, interview the TERI employees NOW, offer volunteer work with the agency,
4. **Extra notes** – maybe include the metrics tool on the EPMS, do reviews more often than beginning, middle and end – should discuss concerns and successes with staff throughout the year, make sure more people know the role or job duty than just one (i.e. there is only one fleet manager who is trained).

## Appendix D

### Summary of Proposed BRIDGE Program

#### Upstate B.R.I.D.G.E. Program - Broadening the Range In Developing Great Employees

*“Bridging Past, Present and Future Innovations”*

##### Bridging the **PAST**...

- Offer incentives for an **Exit Survey** including invitation to serve on a Past Employee Advisory Council to gain knowledge, skills and tips they learned or realized along the way that could help present and future employees through the development of informed training tools
- **Past Employee Advisory Council** (similar to a “member-at-large” position) to share knowledge, retain history of the agency and provide input into planning for future services and training

##### Bridging the **PRESENT**...

- Enhance On-boarding & New Employee Training Process (**Upstate Training Center**)
- Maximize activities of the **SPC Employee Health and Wellness** & the **CARES Subcommittees** (Health Challenges, Star Performers, etc.)
- Survey/coordinate **Ongoing Training** opportunities of various skills (plan for succession, in-house job shadowing, using EPMS to guide plans, time management, organization, etc)
- Invite employees to submit **Bright Ideas** (innovations) that can enhance their tenure with DHEC, improve customer services and/or establish more efficient services or processes

##### Bridging the **FUTURE**...

- Establish structured partnerships with local High Schools (i.e. Carolina High), Colleges, Universities and Technical Schools to re-establish a process for paid or work exchange **Student Experiences** (this would include opportunities to shadow for a day, participate in an internship, fellowship or preceptor relationship or volunteer to allow an opportunity to experience public health and determine if they are truly interested so we can grow our own great employees!)
- The BRIDGE Coordinator will work closely with the region personnel office to monitor the marketing, recruiting and hiring processes for ways to improve upon each including investing in more social marketing that targets millennial and other generational gaps
- The BRIDGE coordinator would be responsible for participating in career fairs and a speaker’s bureau for the services the agency provides as well as the type of jobs available in public health
- Providing a comprehensive and dynamic **New Employee Orientation**
- Offer **New Employee Feedback Surveys** at 1 month, 3 month, 6 month, 1 year and 2 year anniversaries
- Results from the surveys will be used to inform the region regarding the length of time to hire and employee satisfaction as well as their intent to stay with the agency
- The Strategic Planning Champions Customer Service and CARE subcommittees will be responsible for reviewing, analyzing and presenting the data to the Region Leadership Team for suggestions and new implementation strategies.

## Appendix E – Process for filling a position (November 2016):

1. When filling an active vacancy, Hiring Manager (HM) sends PD and request form to HR to put in the request system. For new positions, HM needs to consult with the RHD first.
2. HR enters the request in the online request system.
3. RA approves the budget in the online system
4. RHD approves the position in the online system
5. CO HR approves the position in the online system
6. HR receives notification from the online system that the position is approved
7. HR creates a requisition in NEO Gov and enters the posting (start internally; up to 14 days)
8. HR sends a notification out to staff that the position is posted
9. HR prints the applications.
10. HR screens the applications based on minimum and/or preferred and sends them to CMD
11. CMD sets up interview dates with the panel
12. Interviews occur.
13. Top candidate is selected and packets are sent back to CMD.
14. CMD organizes the packets and sends them back to HR Include in the packets a partially completed ARMs and D-0533 form for the position (personnel will complete the legal name). Please note, VPN access requires the employee to read and sign off on our remote access policies and this will have to occur after the first date of employment.
15. HR begins reference checks. If, after three days of attempting to obtain references HR is unsuccessful they will contact the applicant to see if there are other options.
16. At the same time reference checks are being completed, HR sends the SLED request to CO.
17. Once reference checks are completed, HR will notify the hiring manager and confirm the desire to offer the position contingent on salary.
18. HR will contact the top applicant and offer the position contingent on approvals for salary and SLED (if results are not back yet). During this call, HR will request the applicant email a photocopy of the social security card to obtain their legal name.  
**The goal is to contact the applicant within one week of HR receiving the interview packet with either a need for reference information OR a contingent offer.**
19. Once the SS card is received, HR will send a completed D0533 and ARMs form to IT. Note: This has to occur a minimum of 5 working days prior to the employee's start date.
20. Salary justification forms are completed by the HM and sent to the RHD.
21. RHD sends the SAF to Carolyn.
22. HR sends the SAF to CO personnel for approval.
23. CO personnel sends approval to HR.
24. HR calls the applicant to offer the position.
25. HR notifies the HM of the status of the position.
26. HR emails the offer letter and packet to the applicant and CCs the hiring manager. HR emails the offer letter and packet at least 2 days prior to the sign up.
27. Applicant meets with HR to conduct sign up. HR sends announcement out region wide.

### Color Code:

**GREEN** = Time sensitive tasks  
**YELLOW** = Conducted by the Hiring Manager (HM)